

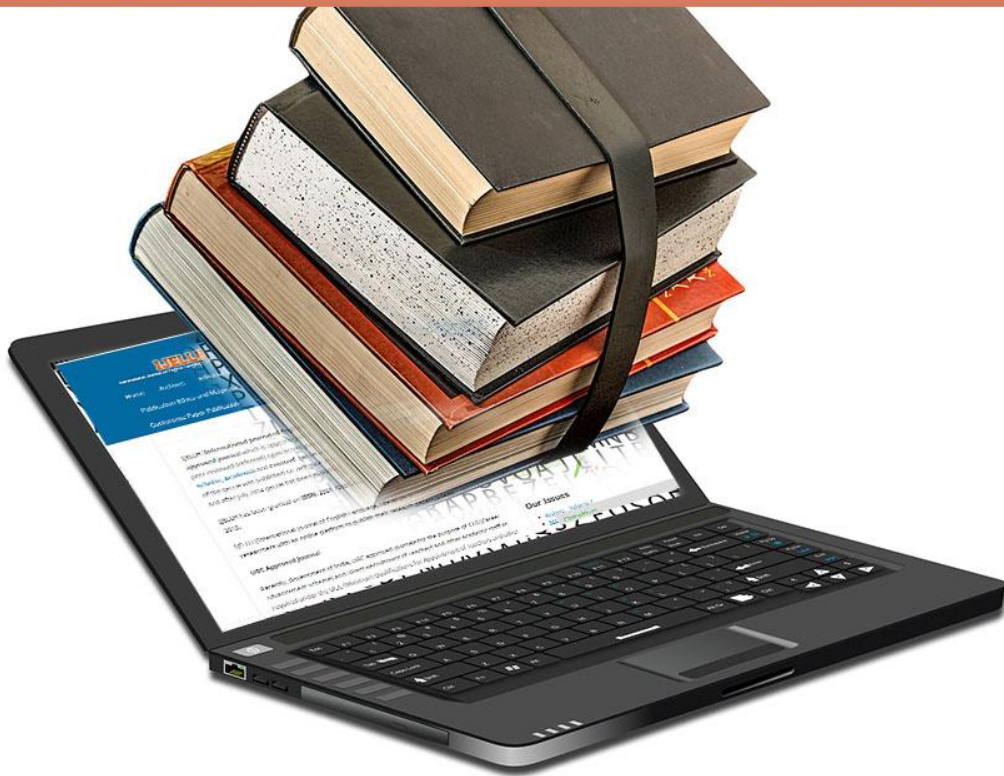
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A Psychological Study of Resilience in Adeline Yen Mah's *Chinese Cinderella*

Abstract

Human life is prone to success and failures; rise and fall, life is not in achieving something but how we achieve the success is what really matters. Success, is not in which it can be gained easily without any efforts, but the real success is that how we overcome all the obstacles and crisis which come on the way to achieve the goals. Every individual in life faces many troubles and crisis, but he should not give up, instead facing it and overcoming the crisis in order to achieve the goals. The ability to overcome the struggles and crisis with positive adaptation is called resilience. It is not a trait but it is the process to promote well-being in an individual. Resilience is how a person bounce back to normal state in the midst of crisis. This study analyses psychological resilience in the main character called Adeline in the non-fiction *Chinese Cinderella* by Adeline Yen Mah.

Key Words: Success, failures, crisis, Resilience, positivity, well-being

Life is not only about success and failures; it is also about the adaptation of positivity and perseverance in traumatic conditions. Human nature is prone to success, failures, depressions, and traumas coming to and fro in life; the way we overcome the traumas and troubles in life with hope and determination is what really matters. It is called as

“Resilience”. The term “Resilience” means “bounce back to normal”. The word ‘Resilience’ originated from the Latin word “resilire” or “to leap back”. In The Oxford dictionary of English defined resilience as “being able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions” (Soanes&Stevenson,1498). It has been used in various disciplines such as engineering, ecology, economics, and psychology.

Resilience is a huge term in Positive Psychology. In defining resilience, there are many definitions being applied to the various fields. In Psychology, “Psychological resilience has been characterized by the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences and by flexible adaptations to the changing demands of stressful experiences” (Tugade&Frederickson,320).In Literature, Resilience is defined as the ability of an entity to recover or bounce back from the traumatic effects of human threats.

In the book, “Handbook of Positive Psychology”, Seligman states that, Positive psychology aims at the change in psychology from a pre-occupational notion not only with repairing the worst things in life but also in building the best qualities in life. The field of positive psychology can be categorized in to three levels such as subjective level, individual level and group level. At the subjective level, it is about wellbeing, satisfaction, joy, sensual pleasures, happiness, optimism, hope and faith. At the individual level, it focuses on the positive personal traits such as love, courage, interpersonal skills, resilience, forgiveness, perseverance, high talent and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the responsibility, moderation, civility, tolerance that moves the individuals towards better nation. Resilience comes under the individual level which focuses on the individual who are facing a risk and the ability to getting out of it with courage and perseverance.

Resilience is a process and not a trait. One should understand the process of resiliency in order to understand the meaning. When an individual faces a crisis or obstacles, there are three ways in which they face the problem. Firstly, they show their anger, secondly, they

overwhelm with negative thoughts and finally they simply upset about the change. Only the third aspect promotes well-being which is mostly employed by the resilient individual. The first and second aspects lead people to instill negative thoughts and reject the individual to adopt any coping methods to face the problem.

A study was conducted among the high achievers of various fields who face the challenging situations which promote resilience. The study examined thirteen high achievers from various professions; all of them experienced challenges in their career and obstacles over the course of their life. But they had overcome all the obstacles and had been recognized for their great achievements. In the study they were interviewed about day to day life in the career and their experiences with resilience. The study analyzed six factors of resilience: Positive personality, Self-control, flexible and adaptable nature, social support, balance perspective, learning through experience. They also found to engage in many unrelated activities such as exercising, spending time with friends and engaging in hobbies.

In the 1960s and 1970s, developmental psychologists turned their attention to research on how some children managed to emerge from the traumatic conditions in and around the family or society. In the year 1973, Emmy Werner, one of the early scientist conducted a study on resilience. She studied a unit of children from Kauai, Hawaii. Kauai was a poor and affected village in which most of the children grew up with alcoholic or mentally ill or unemployed parents. Werner found out that of the children who grew up in these harmful situations, two- third of the children exhibited destructive behaviours in their teen years such as chronic unemployment, substance abuse and out of wedlock births. However, one third of these children did not exhibit any such behaviours, instead they grew up successfully in those adverse situations. So Werner called the latter group 'resilient'. Individuals who suffer from adversity or any risk factor instead of feeling low or depressed, affected individuals, instill hope and determination overcame the stress and became successful at the end.

Resilience research focused on what led some individuals to avoid traumatic stress and aimed to identify personal qualities differentiating the other individuals who were affected in the traumas. In Literature, especially in the genre of fiction, there are characters who were suffering physically and mentally, some couldn't able to withstand the crisis and fall prey whereas some with hope overcome the crisis and are resilient in life. Resilience research is an evolving concept in literature, in which the characters are being analyzed in the point of view of resilience.

This study aims at analyzing the main character of the autobiographical novel called *Chinese Cinderella* written by Adeline Yen Mah. Adeline Yen Mah is a Chinese-American author and a physician. She is born and brought up in Tianjin, China. She is known for her autobiography *Falling Leaves*. Her second work *Chinese Cinderella* talks about the life of Adeline as a fourteen-year-old girl who faces lot of troubles and tortures in her family, and finally she breaks out all the barriers and emerged as a resilient child.

As it is an autobiographical novel, the plot centers upon the life of a fourteen-year-old girl Adeline who was treated as a curse for the family because her mother died after her birth. Her only solace is her Aunt Baba, who treated Adeline like her daughter. As soon as her mother died, her father remarries a French woman, who is called as 'Niang' (mother) in mandarin Chinese. Adeline was physically and mentally tortured by her step mother and her brothers. She is the only target for entertainment in her family. When the novel opens, Adeline is only four years old. Adeline loves her school and she feels that there is finally a place where she is accepted and loved by her classmates. One day she won a silver medal and a certificate for topping the class, but no one in her family appreciated her except Aunt Baba. She was proud of Adeline and stored her medal in a safe-deposit box as it is a precious jewel. When no one in the family acknowledged her, Aunt Baba is the only source of her happiness.

Adeline's father was transferred to Shanghai, so their family shifted to the new area in Shanghai. Adeline started her first grade in a new school. On the first day while returning from school, she eventually forgot the way to her home. Hours went by, her family totally forgot her existence. A shopkeeper noticed Adeline and helped her to call her father to reach home. At her seventh grade in Sacred Heart School, she befriends Wu Chun mei who is a fiery athlete. Adeline and Chun mei shares a beautiful friendship. One day Chun mei lends Adeline a book named "A Little Princess", it was about a little girl escaping poverty by hard work which gives hope for Adeline in which she says that "If I tried hard enough to become a princess like Sara Crewe, perhaps, I, too, might one day reverse everyone's poor opinion of me."(77)

Her brothers' cruelty had increased when one day Adeline won her composition in Children's writing competition. When she returned from school her brothers wanted her to join them. Out of blue her brothers treated her royally and asked her to drink orange juice as the weather is very hot. As she was treated royally, it leads to her suspicion at first. Her brothers said that they are giving a reward for winning the competition. At first she hesitates to drink and because of the compulsion of her brothers, she drinks the juice. When she sips the juice, she could feel the disgusting smell of urine. Her brothers had mixed their urine in the juice and they were rolling in laughter while she drank the juice. She bursted into tears and felt broken by the behavior of her brothers, but still she doesn't lose her hope on herself.

In the class election, Adeline is elected as a class president. This made her to realize the worth of her. Adeline says that, "Though my parents tell me I'm worthless, I've proved them wrong! Of all the girls in my class, my classmates chose me to be their class president.....I'm not worthless"(143). In spite of being elected as president, her classmates throw a surprise party and visit her house without Adeline's knowledge. Niang gets angry

and kicks everyone out of the house and punishes Adeline badly. This incident makes Niang to send Adeline to a boarding school.

Adeline is sent to St. Joseph's Boarding school in Tianjin and she was left to be the only student in the school. She received no letters and no visitors from her family. One day Niang's Older Sister Aunt Reine took her to Hong Kong with the rest of her family. But Adeline's return didn't make Niang angry but avoided her at all costs. After the vacation, Adeline was sent back to another boarding school called Sacred Heart. She was left all alone in the school without any care or love from her family. When every girl leaves the school for summer vacation, but nobody comes to pick up Adeline, so she stays all alone in the school. Adeline had suffered with pneumonia and taken home by her father. She learned that her brothers were sent to England for further studies and she was scared that her parents will make her to marry a stranger and stop her to study further. Adeline was sent back to the boarding school and yet the holidays haven't finished, she spent all the days in the library. Suddenly she had an idea to join the play writing competition which was open for all the students in the world. At first, she was reluctant and afraid but Mother Louisa encouraged her to take part in the competition. After the competition, she didn't receive any information about the results. She felt disappointed.

One day Adeline was called home for Ye Ye's funeral and she felt devastated by the death of her grandfather. As she was waiting for the result, she was called home by her father. She was very scared that her father will make her marry but to the surprise her father expressed his pride and happiness on winning the competition. As a reward, her father gave her permission to letting her study further in England. After four years, Adeline received a letter from Aunt Baba stating that she felt so proud of her and told her the story of Ye Xian who was called as 'Chinese Cinderella'. But Aunt Baba after telling the story she called Adeline as "Chinese Cinderella".

In the Aunt Baba's letter, she states that, "Like Ye Xian you have defied the odds and garnered triumph through your own efforts" (255). Through school and education, Adeline gained confidence in trusting herself and she believed that she had the potential to change her life amidst all odds even though her family let her down. When the novel begins she was an unwanted daughter, but to the last she turned as a wanted daughter by proving her worth. Adeline emerged as a resilient child amidst all odds. Resilience is how an individual gets back to normal and how he overcame the stress and succeeds at the end, as it is similar with Adeline in *Chinese Cinderella* who broke out all the barriers which came on her way. Troubles and challenges makes life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful. The goal of resilience is to thrive not to wither.

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